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2007

# The Northern Iteration: Challenges, Successes and Opportunities of Catholic Universities in Canada

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## Recommended Citation

Higgins, Michael W., "The Northern Iteration: Challenges, Successes and Opportunities of Catholic Universities in Canada" (2007). *Mission and Catholic Identity Publications*. Paper 4.

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# **The Northern Iteration: Challenges, Successes and Opportunities of Catholic Universities in Canada**

Michael W. Higgins, Ph.D.

This paper is a redaction of four panel presentations provided at the Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities' 2007 Annual Meeting held in Washington, D.C. The panelist-presenters were Dr. Gerald Kilan, Ph.D., Principal, King's University College at The University of Western Ontario; Dr. Myroslaw Tataryn, Ph.D., President, St. Jerome's University; Dr. Terrence Downey, Ph.D., President, St. Mary's University College; and Dr. Michael W. Higgins, Ph.D., President, St. Thomas University.

Post-secondary education in Canada is exclusively a provincial concern. As a consequence, and given Canada's diverse and complicated history, post-secondary Catholic education has taken a different direction from that of its immediate southern neighbor. In some respects, this difference has been a boon and, in other respects, a bit of a drawback. After a brief overview of the current national scene in Canadian Catholic higher education, this article presents four distinct representations of the Canadian post-secondary reality, embarking on an illustrative depiction of the landscape.

## **Catholic Higher Education in Canada**

The Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities of Canada (ACCUC) functions as a subset of the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC), although not all members of ACCUC are members of AUCC by virtue of their size, enrollment and canonical status. There are currently 20 full members of ACCUC in Canada and they cover, largely, the depth and breadth of the Dominion. Some of the institutions were founded in the nineteenth century but the majority are twentieth-century creations (see Appendix A). In addition, two recent institutions, Pacific Redeemer College in British Columbia and

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Our Lady Seat of Wisdom College in Ontario, have not achieved provincial recognition. They have not sought admission to ACCUC and, as a consequence, exist on the margins of the national bodies. Many of the Roman Catholic universities and colleges in Canada have an Order or Congregation foundation. Of specific historical importance in Canada are the Congregation of St. Basil, the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, the Society of Jesus and the Ursulines. Each of these bodies will be identified below, with their corresponding institutions.

### *Congregation of St. Basil*

The Basilians have under their supervision the University of St. Michael's College in the University of Toronto, St. Joseph's College in the University of Alberta, St. Thomas More College in the University of Saskatchewan, and Assumption University of Windsor. They were formally involved with St. Mark's College at the University of British Columbia before its merger with Corpus Christi College, its new legal charter under lay leadership.

### *The Oblates of Mary*

The Oblates of Mary Immaculate have responsibility for Canada's pontifical university, Saint Paul University/Université Saint-Paul in Ottawa, ON. This university is primarily a graduate-research institution with a primary focus in the areas of historical and systematic theology, philosophical theology and canon law. It is federated with the secular University of Ottawa that was under Oblate sponsorship for most of its institutional history.

### *The Society of Jesus*

The Jesuits have immediate responsibility for Campanion College in the University of Regina, as well as for Regis College in the University of Toronto. The latter is an exclusively post-graduate research theological institution and differs somewhat from the other members of the ACCUC, with the exception of the Oblate-run pontifical university, Saint Paul in Ottawa, and the lay-run Newman Theological College in Edmonton, Alberta. The French Jesuit foundation, Université de Sudbury, which is part of Laurentian University in Ontario, has only a tenuous tie with the Order as it is currently administered. In addition, the Society of Jesus maintains a continued connection with St. Paul's College at the University of Manitoba, but no longer retains any kind of direct oversight or fiduciary responsibility.

### *The Ursulines*

Brescia University College in the University of Western Ontario is an affiliated institution founded by the Ursulines.

In addition to the institutions already mentioned, the Order of Preachers has direct responsibility for the Collège Dominicain de Philosophie et de Théologie in Ottawa, an institution that not only provides graduate research opportunities both in theology and philosophy but has increasingly taken on undergraduate duties as well in specific relation to the teaching of philosophy. There is also one Benedictine college—St. Peter's College, in Muenster, Saskatchewan—that serves as an affiliated college of the University of Saskatchewan and provides education in only the first two years of an undergraduate program. St. Francis Xavier University in Antigonish, Nova Scotia and St. Thomas University in Fredericton, New Brunswick are autonomous universities that have a diocesan genesis. Corpus Christi College and St. Mark's College in the University of British Columbia and St. Mary's University College in Calgary, Alberta are recent successful initiatives that are lay-led and have clear diocesan association, as does King's University College in London, Ontario. St. Jerome's University in the University of Waterloo was founded in the nineteenth century by the Congregation of the Resurrection but has been under lay leadership since 1989.

#### **Four Iterations**

In order to present the larger mosaic of post-secondary education options and directions in the Canadian landscape, four specific institution types within the larger Northern iteration are presented: a diocesan university college affiliated with a constituent university, a federated university in a constituent university, an autonomous provincial and publicly funded Roman Catholic university, and an independent university college with degree-granting rights of diocesan genesis and under exclusive lay leadership. I have chosen these specific institutional representations because they speak to the diversity of foundational history, regional developments, cultural-political realities and geographical differences of Canada.

#### *Affiliated*

King's University College was established in 1954 by the Diocese of London, Ontario. Originally it was affiliated with St. Peter's Seminary, the diocesan seminary adjacent to King's; it was often seen as a training ground for future priests. In fact, its original name was Christ the King College. No religious order was ever involved in the founding of the college, but many of its initial faculty were diocesan priests who had cross appointments at St. Peter's Seminary. However, the concept of a feeder school for the Seminary did not survive the 1960s and new strategies became essential for the institution to flourish. As a consequence, in 1968 it became co-ed and established its social work program. Lay

leadership was almost immediate in its new form. By 1970, there were two priests on the faculty, and since the 1980s, there has been only a priest chaplain initially supported by one campus minister. There was a formal affiliation agreement—negotiated by the principals of the three affiliated university colleges, the President and Provost of The University of Western Ontario—presented to the College Councils of the Affiliated Colleges and the Senate of the constituent university, and ratified by the Boards of each institution. The agreement lays out the rules of the game and underscores the particular affiliation relationship between King's, Brescia University College (a Roman Catholic all-women's institution), and Huron University College (an Anglican institution with its own graduate Faculty of Divinity) in terms of their more articulated relationship with the public constituent university. As is the case with all affiliated and federated institutions in Canada, King's University College does not grant degrees; degree-granting powers are waived as a condition of affiliation and federation. The degrees are granted by the Senate of the constituent university. In these particular instances, when affiliated and federated institutions have appropriately waived any degree-granting rights, convocation ceremonies identify clearly the Catholic constituencies. In most instances, chancellors of these respective institutions bestow the degrees upon their particular recipients.

King's University College offers a traditional arts and social sciences program seeking to complement the University of Western Ontario's offerings while underscoring its own distinctiveness as a Catholic institution. King's University College has developed popular and unique programs that include a Bachelor of Social Work/Master of Social Work (BSW/MSW), a strong Roman Catholic Studies Program and World Religions Program that are both situated within the College's Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies, (the Department for The University of Western Ontario lies resident in King's), a special Social Justice and Peace Studies Program, and Thanatology. In 2005-06, King's established the first Centre for Catholic-Jewish Learning in a Canadian Catholic university.

With regard to funding issues, there has been no diocesan support for the operating budget for more than 40 years, although there have been generous gifts to Capital Campaigns of the last several decades. Forty percent of the operating budget comes from the provincial government, 53 percent comes from tuition, and seven percent comes from development. As is the case with all affiliated and federated institutions, the money from the appropriate provincial ministry is transferred through the financial offices of the constituent university and is determined

according to the specific agreement that has been signed by the respective institutions. As a consequence, there is considerable variability, not only intra-provincially, but also inter-provincially.

### *Federated*

The next institution under consideration is St. Jerome's University in the University of Waterloo. St. Jerome's represents the ideal model for federation, a concept that is rooted in the British historical inheritance and underscores the particular relationship that a denominational or confessional institution can have with its secular counterpart. The argument here is that Roman Catholic institutions will become stronger when united with public institutions. The Catholic institutions must, by law, be open to non-Catholic students, non-Catholic staff and non-Catholic faculty. St. Jerome's University was founded in 1865 but became federated in 1960, a year after the formal founding of the University of Waterloo. In fact, the University of St. Jerome's College, as it was then known, was one of the co-founders of the University of Waterloo. The current enrollment at the University of Waterloo is 27,000 full-time and part-time students and St. Jerome's University is 900 full-time and part-time students. However, the funding formula is calculated in such a way that the actual number of students taught during the course of the year is close to 13,000. It is this latter figure that determines the financial flow.

In keeping with like institutions—St. Thomas More College at the University of Saskatchewan and the University of St. Michael's College at the University of Toronto—St. Jerome's emphasizes liberal arts while given the unique nature of the University of Waterloo, there is a strong mathematics faculty present at St. Jerome's. It operates within a comprehensive university that embraces not only professional schools, but a strong graduate and research profile. Still, the emphasis at St. Jerome's University, as indeed with the other federated Catholic institutions, like St. Thomas More and St. Michael's, is on undergraduate teaching. There is a strong emphasis at all three institutions on philosophy, and theology is taught at both St. Michael's and at St. Jerome's. St. Jerome's shares common services with the larger university: athletic facilities, tuition fees, faculty salaries, health services, overall recruitment strategies, most academic planning, degree-conferral and convocations, teaching and research support, and library access. However, as can be seen through the elaboration of an independent budget, through faculty hiring, tenure, and promotion, there is considerable latitude for autonomy. (Although this is clearly the case

for St. Jerome's and St. Thomas More, it is no longer the case at the University of St. Michael's College, as a consequence of the 1974 Kelly Memorandum, which resulted in the loss of the federated college's right to appoint its own faculty.) The federated institutions have their own program. St. Jerome's University, for instance, has Legal Studies and Studies in Sexuality, Marriage and the Family; St. Michael's has a program in Celtic Studies; and St. Thomas More has a pronounced emphasis in Philosophy. In all three federates there is appropriate and college-specific staffing. The institutions all have their own Registrar, Directors of Student Services, Development Officers, Alumni Officers, and Librarians. In addition, all institutions have their respective Board of Governors, Regents, or Trustees. In at least two of the three instances identified, they have their own chancellors.

In spite of the reciprocal advantages obtained by formal federation, there are tension points. For instance, new initiatives are sometimes cumbersome to both arrange and to finance. There are often faculty expectations regarding the larger research university versus the goals of a Catholic undergraduate university that causes some conflict. In addition, there is occasional competition for students, collisions—intended or otherwise—around the matter of capital funding. Finally, there is the need to preserve the Catholic mission of the institution in the context of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, the statutes of the constituent university, provincial human rights legislation, and labor relations codes.

### *Autonomous Provincial and Publicly-Funded*

St. Thomas University is, unlike the other institutions, a discrete and independent institution that currently has an affiliation agreement with the University of New Brunswick, but confers its own degrees, maintains complete independent financial status, and operates, although contiguously, as an autonomous institution. St. Thomas was founded in 1910 by the Bishop of Chatham, New Brunswick. The Basilian Fathers of Toronto assumed charge of the institution in its earlier form when it was known as St. Thomas College and largely provided education for boys at the secondary and junior college level. When the Basilian Fathers left after 1923, the college came under the direction of the clergy of the Diocese of Chatham. In 1938, the Diocese of Chatham became the Diocese of Bathurst, New Brunswick. A change in juridical status occurred in 1959, when St. Thomas College was transferred to the Diocese of Saint John. From 1910-1934, St. Thomas College retained its original status largely as a high school and junior

college, and became a degree-granting institution in 1934 through the provincial legislature. In 1960, St. Thomas College became St. Thomas University, and in 1962, a Royal Commission on Higher Education in the province recommended that St. Thomas University move from Chatham to Fredericton.

St. Thomas University provides a full range of undergraduate offerings in the traditional humanities and social sciences. Key disciplines include Anthropology to Sociology, and also include special programs in Mathematics, Science and Technology Studies, Journalism<sup>1</sup> and Communication Studies, Criminology and Criminal Justice, a Gerontology Program and a comprehensive Human Rights undergraduate degree.<sup>2</sup> The University also provides both Religious Studies and Catholic Studies options. In addition, the University has several endowed chairs: Catholic Theology, Citizenship and Human Rights, Criminology and Criminal Justice, Journalism, Gerontology, Native Studies and Interdisciplinary Studies.

St. Thomas University also provides two post-baccalaureate undergraduate degrees or professional programs: the Faculty of Education and Department of Social Work. It consistently ranks high in the national surveys in undergraduate education, not only provincially and regionally, but nationally. It continues to maintain its ranking in the top 10 primarily undergraduate institutions in Canada, a ranking that it shares with only one other Roman Catholic university in that category, the similarly autonomous St. Francis Xavier University in Nova Scotia.

### *Lay-Led University College*

St. Mary's University College is unique in several respects. Established in 1986, it is Canada's first post-Vatican II Catholic university college. It is the first and only Catholic university college in Canadian history not founded and developed exclusively by a religious order of priests, brothers or sisters or by diocesan clergy. St. Mary's is the first Catholic university college in Canadian history to be led from the outset by lay persons and is currently the only free standing Catholic university college in Canada that has been established since the nineteenth century.

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<sup>1</sup> The only Catholic university in Canada that has a Journalism Program.

<sup>2</sup> St. Thomas is home to the Atlantic Human Rights Centre.



In the absence of the rich intellectual heritage of Catholic scholarship in Catholic universities founded by religious orders such as the Jesuits, Oblates, Basilians or Ursulines, St. Mary's has had to define its own tradition and has developed a rather elaborate statement of educational objectives and educational philosophy. St. Mary's accomplished this through a systematic study of both the letter and the spirit of *Ex corde Ecclesiae*. It also employed environmental scanning, a strategy used by political scientists. It looked at the history and stated philosophy of each of the major, good Catholic universities in Canada, the United States and elsewhere, and then borrowed freely to achieve a defining statement of educational objectives, educational philosophy, and academic freedom.

Enrollment at St. Mary's University College continues to increase. In fact, it has increased 20-fold in less than a decade. In the near future, St. Mary's hopes to complement its current undergraduate degree program with an education degree. The funding for St. Mary's University College is not dependent upon a federated or affiliated agreement with a constituent university. St. Mary's University College depends upon some provincial ministry grants; significant fund raising and modest tuition.

### **Challenges and Opportunities**

As you can see, with the examples provided above, the Canadian Catholic post-secondary education landscape is a diverse one. There are several models. We have affiliated institutions, we have federated institutions, we have autonomous provincial and publicly funded university colleges and we have lay-led universities. There is no question that the challenges around Catholicity are far greater for the autonomous institutions than they are for the others. Federated and affiliated institutions are expected to bring a unique and valued tone, character, and complementary dimension to the larger constituent sector or reality. In other words, the constituent universities—University of Waterloo, University of Toronto, University of Western Ontario, etc.—expect their Catholic federates or affiliates to be distinctive in their mission, complementary in their educational philosophy, and not engaged in needless replication or assimilation.

What is true for the federates and affiliates also applies in large measure for the university college, but not necessarily for the historically autonomous or independent institutions. The reasons for the evolution of these institutions and trajectories taken in sharp contrast with federated and affiliated institutions comprise a cautionary tale. For instance, of the 20 institutions in the country that are obligated

to append, adopt, or integrate the Canadian Ordinances of *Ex corde Ecclesiae*, only three have not been formally in the position to do so, and two of these are the autonomous Maritime universities. This occurrence is not a result of public funding, as public funding is available to all the Catholic institutions of higher learning to some degree per agreement negotiated with their constituent counterparts. In fact, if you look at various former Catholic universities in the Maritime region—St. Mary's University in Halifax, Mount St. Vincent University in Halifax, St. Dunstan's University in Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island, Xavier Junior College in Sydney, Nova Scotia—you discover that their secularization was the result of several factors. These included access to enhanced government funding, but were by no means restricted to that. It is possible for Catholic institutions at the post-secondary level to thrive in the Atlantic Provinces while maintaining their confessional status, but history has suggested otherwise. This history has been distinguished by labor militancy, conflict over hire-for-mission strategies, ambivalent relationships between originally conceived and founded diocesan universities with their respective diocese, the increase of lay presence in all levels of administration and teaching in the university structure, episcopal disengagement, union anxiety, post-Second Vatican Council malaise, and identity issues specific to a largely clericalized and homogenous Catholic culture (the Scots presence in St. Francis Xavier and the Irish presence at St. Thomas University). In other words, there are considerable historical variables that contribute to the evolution of Catholic institutions across the country including the rapid secularization of all Catholic institutions in the Province of Quebec, the incremental secularization of Catholic institutions in the Atlantic Provinces, the disappearance of a Catholic university presence in the province of Prince Edward Island, the significant growth and expansion of Catholic universities and colleges in the Prairie Provinces and British Columbia, and the extraordinarily vital but fully integrated Catholic presence in the Province of Ontario. These iterations demonstrate the variety and complexity of the Canadian post-secondary education scene.

### Sources and Recommended Reading

James M. Cameron, *On The Idea of a University* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1978).

Caroline DiGiovani, ed. *The Philosophy of Catholic Education* (Ottawa: Novalis, 1992).

Michael W. Higgins; McGowan, Brian; Murphy, Dennis; Trafford, Larry, eds. *Catholic Education: Transforming Our World—A Canadian Perspective* (Ottawa: Novalis, 1991).

Michael W. Higgins and Douglas R. Letson, *Power and Peril: The Catholic Church at the Crossroads* (Toronto: HarperCollins, 2002).

Additional sources include twice-annual summary reports to the Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities of Canada by the member Executive Heads, periodic publications by the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada, annual reports by Statistics Canada, the annual University Issues of *MacLean's* and the *The Globe and Mail*, and various reports from think tanks and lobbying bodies like the Atlantic Institute for Market Studies, the Fraser Institute, and the Institute for Catholic Education. As well, many of the Catholic institutions of higher learning, like St. Thomas More College, St. Francis Xavier University, and St. Jerome's University, have published institutional histories.

## Appendix A

Institution	Funding	Curricular
St. Francis Xavier (Antigonish, NS)	Government/tuition	BA, BSc, BEd, MA
St. Thomas University (Fredericton, NB)	Government/tuition	BA, BAA, BSW, BEd
Saint-Paul (Ottawa, ON)	Government/tuition	BA, BTh, MTh, DCL, PhD, STD (jointly with University of Ottawa)
Dominican University College (Ottawa, ON)	Government/tuition	BPh, BTh, MPh, MTh, PhD, PhDTh
Brescia College (London, ON)	Government/tuition	BA, BSc, MSc
King's University College (London, ON)	Government/tuition	BA, BSW, MSW
St. Jerome's (Waterloo, ON)	Government/tuition	BA, BMath, MCT
St. Michael's College (Toronto, ON)	Government/tuition	BA, BDiv, MA, MDiv, MTh, DDiv, DTh, MRE
Regis College (Toronto, ON)	Government/tuition	STL, MA, STD, MTS, PhD, MDiv
Assumption University (Windsor, ON)	Foundation	BA
University of Sudbury (Sudbury, ON)	Government/tuition	All graduate programs offered at the University of Manitoba
St. Paul's (Winnipeg, MB)	University grant	
Campion College (Regina, SK)	Government/tuition	BA, BSc, BFA, BMus
St. Thomas More (Saskatoon, SK)	Government/tuition	BA, BSc, BMus
St. Joseph's College (Edmonton, AB)	Government/tuition	BA
St. Mary's (Calgary, AB)	Government/tuition	BA, BEd
St. Mark's (Vancouver, BC)	Tuition	MARE, MATS, MAPS
Corpus Christi (Vancouver, BC)	Tuition	First 2 years (Lib Arts Diploma)
Newman Theological (Edmonton, AB)	Tuition and Foundation	MDiv, MTh, MTS, MRE
St. Peter's (Muenster, SK)	Government/tuition	First 2 years

NS, Nova Scotia; NB, New Brunswick; ON, Ontario; MB, Manitoba; SK, Saskatchewan; AB, Alberta; BC, British Columbia; UWO, University of Western Ontario; BA, Bachelor of Arts; BAA, Bachelor of Applied Arts; BSc, Bachelor of Science; BEd, Bachelor of Education; BDiv, Bachelor of Divinity; BFA, Bachelor of Fine Arts; BMath, Bachelor of Mathematics; BMus, Bachelor of Music; BPh, Bachelor of Philosophy; BSW, Bachelor of Social Work; BTh, Bachelor of Theology; MA, Master of Arts; MTh, Master of Theology; MPh, Master of Philosophy; MSc, Master of Science; MSW, Master of Social Work; MCT, Master of Catholic Thought; MDiv, Master of Divinity; MRE, Master of Religious Education; MTS, Master of Theological Studies; MARE, Master of Arts (Religious Education); MATS, Master of Arts (Theological Studies); MAPS, Master of Arts (Pastoral Studies); DCL, Doctor of Canon Law; DDiv, Doctor of Divinity; DTh, Doctor of Theology; STD, Doctor of Sacred Theology; STL, License in Sacred Theology; PhD, Doctor of Philosophy.